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ABSTRACT

This booklet is intended to help educators and school personnel address the serious national problem of homelessness among children. It is very likely that there are homeless children in any given school jurisdiction. Some of the educational needs of these children are outlined, and suggestions are given for actions that people within state or local agencies, schools, and shelters might take to ensure an appropriate education for them. Information was obtained through telephone interviews with homeless project staff, visits to state and local schools and programs, and literature reviews. Specific problems that are addressed are (1) ensuring access to schools, (2) meeting the personal needs of homeless children, (3) providing academic support systems, and (4) collaborating with other agencies to provide services to the homeless population. Descriptions of school district and local school efforts provide examples of ways schools can work toward the requirements of the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act. Additional support services are listed, and some specific suggestions are given for administrators, secretaries, teachers, counselors, other school personnel, shelter providers, and state and local service providers. (Contains 67 references.) (SLD)

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SERVING HOMELESS CHILDREN:

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF EDUCATORS

ED 369 867

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SERVING HOMELESS CHILDREN:
The Responsibilities of Educators

September 1992

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20202-6132

Dear Fellow Educators:

Throughout the United States, homeless children and their families wage a continuing battle to participate in school on the same footing as their more materially advantaged classmates. Countless caring administrators and teachers help in this struggle. But there is still much more to be done.

This booklet describes many ways to help homeless students achieve full, effective participation in the educational programs to which they are entitled. The ideas here are important for many reasons, from the simple justice of ensuring access to services, to the imperative need of including every child in the campaign to achieve the national education goals.

Efforts to extend services to homeless students need not take the form of elaborate programs. In fact, singling out these students for special programs would be counterproductive in most situations. What is needed is effective, behind-the-scenes work to ensure that every child has access to appropriate services, and that red tape does not ensnarl the homeless families for whom every daily routine can be a struggle. Through administrative policies and procedures, classroom practice, and collaboration with other agencies, educators can ease the way for homeless students.

Schools and school systems that embark on this work can find many good strategies and ideas for policies in this booklet. Rather than specifying full-blown exemplary models to be copied in detail, the booklet presents dozens of solutions to the specific, everyday problems that arise in effectively serving homeless students. I urge you to use it as a source of practical help in your own work.

Sincerely,

Mary Jean LeTendre
Director
Compensatory Education Programs

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Introduction

Jessica; her brother, Christopher; her two-year-old sister, Shana; and their mother, Margaret; lived in a tenement. There, the daily challenges included battling rodents and insects that invaded their lives. Often Jessica had to stay up at night to protect her baby sister's crib from rats. At school she would often fall asleep in class while trying to complete a writing assignment. Concerned, her teacher sent notes home to Margaret asking if Jessica was getting enough sleep.

After six months, Jessica's family moved from the tenement house to a shelter. There, things got worse; Jessica became more detached from her teacher and friends at school. Her grades began to suffer severely because she couldn't find a quiet place to study amidst all the noise and confusion at the shelter. Soon, frustrated with her school work and ashamed of her appearance and lack of appropriate supplies for school, Jessica began skipping school altogether.

It was not long after Jessica began skipping school, however, that the local school district began providing special services for homeless children and their families. Family workers in the school district visited the shelter every day to make sure the children attended school and had adequate clothing and school supplies. This district also began training teachers and school staff to be sensitive to "the feelings and shame and to the great gaps in knowledge that often go along with being a homeless child" (Berger, New York Times, *April, 1990). Finally, as a result of the efforts of school district officials and shelter providers, a special, quiet room in the shelter was set aside where children could do their homework after school. Soon, Jessica started feeling better about her life and her school work. Margaret took advantage of the new adult education courses being provided by the school district; she started classes in nutrition, methods of discipline, and GED preparation.*

As a result of the school district's efforts, often in concert with shelter providers, Jessica's educational experiences have become more positive. She has gotten 100 percent on spelling tests and an award for perfect attendance. Margaret says Jessica "feels better, feels safe. The teacher sent me a note that said she's a bright girl and she's developing well."

Homelessness is stressful, especially for children. Living in shelters or other cramped living quarters often gives rise to physical and emotional difficulties. Children of families living in shelters can suffer developmental delays, learning difficulties, and high levels of depression and anxiety as a result of overcrowded and/or temporary living conditions. In fact, one research study has shown that high percentages of school-age children living in shelters fail school or are retained at least one year (Bassuk & Rubin, 1987).

If we are to accomplish the National Education Goals, we must serve children from all walks of life. All children have the right to receive high-quality educational and social services in a safe and caring environment. Subtitle VII-B of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (the McKinney Act) assures this right to homeless children and youth.

The McKinney Act provisions are premised on three policies: (1) all homeless children have the same right to a free and appropriate public education as non-homeless children; (2) states should review and revise residency laws and "other laws, regulations, practices, or policies that may act as a barrier to the enrollment, attendance, or success in school of homeless children and homeless youth"; and (3) homelessness alone is not a sufficient reason to separate students from the mainstream school environment (McKinney Act, Section 721).

This booklet is intended to help educators and school personnel to better address this serious national problem. Whether you are a school secretary, teacher, principal, district office employee, shelter provider, or superintendent—you should read this. The probability is great that there are homeless children in your community needing your help. In fact, significant numbers of homeless children have been identified in urban, suburban, and rural areas throughout the country (U.S. Government Accounting Office, 1990). Estimates of the numbers vary: states reported that 220,000 school-age children were homeless during the 1988-89 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 1989); a more recent estimate is that approximately 450,000 children of all ages in this country are homeless (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 1990); and many experts believe both estimates are low.

This booklet outlines some of the educational needs of homeless children and youth and suggests actions that people within state or local agencies, schools, and shelters might take to help ensure an appropriate education for them. Information was obtained through telephone interviews with homeless project staff, visits to state and local schools and programs, and literature reviews. Therefore, the strategies that are discussed below are not

unrealistic or abstract ideas. Rather, they are concrete examples of how people in all parts of the U.S. have developed and organized resources to meet the needs of homeless children and families. Many of the examples in this booklet are drawn from federally funded programs; similar examples could have been drawn from other programs that many educators, corporate sponsors, and advocates believe are exemplary. We have not systematically searched for "the best" programs in the country but for programs that represent the many good ideas currently at work.

We strongly encourage you to share information about what joint projects you are doing with other people in the education field. Not surprisingly, one of the most significant findings of our study is that people and organizations serving homeless children need to communicate with each other. Effective programs exist throughout the nation, and the information they can offer is too valuable not to share.

In the sections that follow, we define and discuss the specific problems that prevent homeless children and youth from receiving quality education. Specifically, we discuss issues of ensuring access to school, meeting homeless children's personal needs, providing academic support systems, and collaborating with other agencies to provide services to the homeless population. Finally, we offer suggestions about how educators and other social service providers can make a difference in the lives of homeless children and their families.

This booklet tells you how educators and other service providers have solved some of the problems that impede high-quality education for homeless children. Not every example will be applicable to your situation, but educators in many different types of communities can find practical ideas here about ways to:

- expedite the requirements and procedures for enrolling children and youth in school, especially through new ways of handling records;
- provide homeless students with transportation services comparable to those that other students receive, as the law requires;
- meet students' health needs and other personal needs efficiently and without calling undue attention to them;
- increase teachers' and other students' sensitivity to the problems that homeless children and youth face; and
- ensure that students who move often—including homeless students and also many other students—do not miss out on the educational services they deserve.

Access to Education

The Smith family has recently had to move out of an apartment and into a shelter fifteen miles away. According to district residency and enrollment policies, the children must either attend the school closest to the shelter where they reside or the parents must transport their children back to their home school. Although school is a priority for the family, Mr. and Mrs. Smith cannot provide the transportation necessary to keep their children in their old school.

Hoping to make the best of things, Mrs. Smith goes to the new local school to enroll her children. The secretary tells her that, because school has already started, the enrollment process is going to be difficult. The mother insists she wants to enroll her children. The secretary asks where the family lives. When Mrs. Smith gives the address, the secretary tells her that the bus route does not serve that neighborhood. The secretary then asks for the children's health and academic records from their previous school. The mother doesn't have them. She explains that they had to leave their last residence rather quickly. The secretary calls the registrar for assistance, and the registrar asks Mrs. Smith if she has any identification to verify residency. She doesn't have an electric bill or a phone bill to offer. The secretary asks if the mother might have copies of the children's birth certificates, but she does not. The registrar explains to Mrs. Smith that in order to enroll her children, the school needs proof of guardianship, proof of residency, and immunization records. She then tells Mrs. Smith that they will contact the old school, but in the meantime the children will not be allowed to attend school.

The story you have just read shows some of the barriers that homeless families are regularly forced to surmount in school districts across the country. Homeless parents trying to enroll their children in school must overcome numerous obstacles, including lack of academic and health records, lack of convenient transportation, and difficulty in proving residency or guardianship. While education is usually as much of a priority for homeless families as for non-homeless families, it must compete with other unmet needs such as obtaining food and clothing, finding a place to live, and finding suitable employment.

In addition, homeless parents may not have the experience, time, or resources necessary to find their way through the bureaucratic maze that faces them as they try to register their children for school without the necessary records. There is often no agency or individual willing or able to take responsibility to see that parents are given the assistance they need to register their children. This means that when school districts are unclear about jurisdictional responsibilities and parents do not have the time or skills necessary to follow up on required forms, the result can be that homeless students are effectively denied access to the education guaranteed to them.

We address below some of the major barriers faced by homeless children and families as they attempt to gain access to public education.

Records and Enrollment

Most school districts require that families provide school and immunization records as a condition for a child's enrollment. Also required is proof of residency and guardianship. However, homeless families often do not have such information readily available for any of the following reasons:

- families that have recently moved or are living in a temporary shelter may have difficulty keeping health and other records;
- the cost of obtaining copies of documents may be prohibitive; or
- children or youth may not live with their legal guardians.

States receiving Stewart B. McKinney funds are required to develop plans that demonstrate that they have reviewed and revised policies in order to remove barriers to enrollment for homeless children. The McKinney Act requires that in revising their laws, states consider issues concerning requirements of immunization, residency, birth certificates, school records or other documentation, and guardianship. It also requires that special attention be given to ensuring the enrollment and attendance of homeless children who are not currently attending school (McKinney Act, Section 722(e)(9)).

The following are examples of what school districts and others are doing to assist families and expedite the enrollment process.

• The Philadelphia School District has adopted enrollment policies devised by the Homeless Student Initiative project, which include the following:

> Homeless students living in shelters must be admitted to schools immediately upon arrival, regardless of whether they have immunization records or transfers. Receiving schools are responsible for contacting the previous school for records.
>
> Homeless students who are eligible for special education are to be admitted to a school with or without records. A school may not exclude homeless special education students while records are being transferred or because there is no special education program in that school.

In addition to adopting these enrollment policies, the district appointed a homeless liaison to expedite the enrollment process for homeless students. The liaison operates a homeless student identification and tracking system in conjunction with the school district's Attendance Division. This tracking system consists of computerized student files, compiled by the school district, containing current information about the enrollment status of children who reside in shelters. With information obtained by shelter providers, the liaison uses the files to enter important information concerning shelter placement and the enrollment status of homeless children. If a child moves out of a shelter, the liaison is responsible for entering the new residency data into the system and verifying that the child has enrolled in a new school. If the student moves to a new school because the family has moved to a new shelter, the liaison contacts the new school regarding the transfer of school records.

• Like Philadelphia's project, Oregon's Salem-Keizer School District has a Homeless Education Program that employs a home-school liaison. This person works closely with the homeless families, shelters, and schools to facilitate students' enrollment in local schools. The liaison closely monitors the needs of homeless families and continuously links them with the relevant service providers. The liaison also works directly with parents to fill out any necessary forms. The project uses a tracking system to facilitate the transfer of academic and health records to students' new schools.

• New York City's Community School District #2 employs six case-management associates who work to ensure that homeless children have access to adequate transportation to schools, proper academic screening and placement, and counseling services. They have set up a process for monitoring students' attendance at school, which includes interviewing all new shelter families and contacting students' previous schools to

obtain school and immunization records. Students' school attendance is tracked by the case managers, who visit every school in the district every two weeks to check attendance records; when attendance is erratic, case managers begin calling parents and even visiting them at the shelters to encourage them to get their children to school daily. Finally, the district has set up a computerized database for tracking the residency and enrollment status of all shelter children. Every month, all sub-districts in District #2 that are serving homeless students must provide the central district office with updated information about students' date of birth, their identification number, the number of days they have been present in school, when they were admitted to the school, and their most current place of residence.

• The San Francisco Unified School District has made arrangements with the Department of Public Health so children can be immunized immediately. The district has also developed procedures for locating school records or preparing affidavits if records are missing. If parents cannot present a birth certificate for their children, they can fill out a guardianship/emancipation form. The school district will serve any child when an adult claims guardianship for that child. The district also has developed transportation agreements to ensure that all children can remain in the same school where they are enrolled even if their family moves to a new district. Finally, the district developed a circular routing system to inform incoming shelter families about available social services in the district. This information is also relayed to families through the schools and the Department of Public Social Services.

• To aid the schools' enrollment process in Orange County, California, homeless families can claim the county's department of education as their official place of residence. In addition, the county has installed an 800 number that families can use to notify the department of education of their whereabouts within southern California. This arrangement allows the department to monitor the most current location of the area's homeless children.

• Arizona legislation has made residency requirements for school enrollment more flexible for homeless children and youth. Previously, residency requirements directed all children and youth to attend school in the district where their parents or guardians resided. Now, schools can enroll children and youth who live with an adult other than their parents or guardians, but only if "evidence indicates the living situation is in the child's best interest." This caveat was inserted into the legislation in order to avoid creating an open enrollment policy throughout the state. Accordingly, district staff determine on a case-by-case basis whether evidence exists to warrant

children and youth living with people other than their parents or guardians. In addition, homeless children and youth no longer must provide birth certificates or other identification in order to enroll in school.

- All Maryland school districts have developed policies that remove barriers to enrollment. The Allegany County school district has the following policies:

  A parent or guardian and student with a questionable place of residence may present themselves to register at a public school. School personnel then make a determination of the student's homelessness based upon the state definition. If the student is identified as homeless, the school must register the student and arrange for free lunch and transportation services.

  A homeless student may arrive at the school to register without a parent or guardian. The student should be registered immediately and efforts should be made to contact parents or guardians to complete the registration process. School staff should maintain documentation of all written and verbal communication and home visits to contact guardians. If no parent or guardian is located, the local social service agency should be contacted.

  Homeless students without a birth certificate and or immunization records are allowed to register. After the student is enrolled, the school is required to contact the former school and request the student's school records.

Transportation

The transportation of students to and from school is another issue that districts must address. The McKinney Act requires states to review and undertake to remove transportation barriers (Section 721(2)), and it requires schools and districts to provide homeless students with transportation services comparable to those offered other students (McKinney Act, Section 722 (e)(5)). Nevertheless, shelters are often not located on regular school bus routes, so the children in shelters can be faced with the choice of either paying for public transportation (if it exists) or not attending school.

Transportation issues become more complicated when a family moves to a shelter in a new area but wants to keep the student enrolled in the previous or "home" school. The amended McKinney Act states that the local education agency shall either continue the child's education in the school of origin for the remainder of the academic year (or for the following year in the case where a child becomes homeless between academic years) or enroll the child in the school of the attendance area where he or she is actually living. Parental preference must be considered in this decision (McKinney Act, Section 722(e)(3)).

When a homeless student moves from one school district to another, it is often unclear which district, if any, has the responsibility to pay the transportation costs of that student. Often, students remain out of school while jurisdictional issues are worked out or while they wait to receive transportation passes. Meanwhile, a homeless family living in temporary shelter may be forced to move before these issues are resolved, thus forcing the family to begin the process all over again.

Following are some examples of ways programs have begun to meet transportation needs:

- The state of Connecticut enacted legislation that requires a student's former school district to pay for transporting the student from the shelter to the former school.
- Homeless students living in the Madison, Wisconsin Metropolitan School District take taxis to their home schools. The school district maintains an account with local cab companies, and students give the account number to the cab drivers.
- The Salem-Keizer, Oregon Area Transit System provides free bus tickets to homeless children, enabling them to attend their original schools when their families move outside the district.

Students' Personal Needs

Mary is a very happy, healthy, well-adjusted second grader. She likes her teachers, her school work, and has lots of friends with whom she plays during recess and after school. Every time Mary's former first grade teacher, Mrs. Johnson, sees Mary in the hallway, she marvels at the change that's taken place in Mary's behavior, attitude, health, and appearance. After all, only a few months have passed since Mary returned to school.

When Mary was in her first grade class, Mrs. Johnson knew that she was living in a homeless shelter with her family. Nevertheless, it was not until Mary stopped coming to school that she realized the extent to which the living situation was affecting the child's attitude and performance. When Mrs. Johnson called a social service agency to find out what she could do to help Mary, she learned that her own school district had just developed a new program for homeless children and youth. The program provided health care and nutritional services to homeless children, as well as referrals for homeless families to other service agencies that provide food, clothing, and supplies for school.

Immediately, Mrs. Johnson approached her principal to see what could be done to obtain these services for Mary. After a few days and a series of phone calls to the district office, the shelter where Mary lived, and various social service agencies in the community, Mrs. Johnson and the principal were able to get Mary back into school and connected to the services provided under the district's new program. Soon, Mary had proper clothes and adequate school supplies, and she rarely had to miss school for health reasons.

At the same time, Mrs. Johnson began developing a special instructional unit on the conditions of homelessness. She remembered how Mary never seemed to have many friends and was sometimes taunted by her class-mates about her appearance. She also wanted to develop teachers' awareness of homelessness, remembering how long it took her to react to the problems Mary was experiencing in school. The new instructional unit encouraged both teachers and students to be sensitive to the physical and emotional needs of homeless people and helped them learn about the economic and social trends that precipitate homelessness.

In order to make homeless children's school experiences more positive and productive, school personnel and shelter providers must consider taking action to meet the basic and personal needs of their homeless student population. As research has warned, meeting these needs is often a prerequisite for normal development and success in school. The following sections define those needs that often go unmet. In addition, they offer strategies and programmatic responses to combat some of the disadvantages resulting from being homeless.

Physical Needs

For poor and homeless children, inadequate medical care is among the most serious problems. In fact, homeless children often receive medical attention only in emergencies. Consequently, many are not fully immunized and may suffer from untreated infections, allergies, and internal ailments. As if these problems are not enough, homeless parents typically cannot purchase adequate food or do not have access to cooking facilities to feed their children. A lack of proper nutrition is also one of the leading health problems among homeless children. In addition, because shelters are often overcrowded, homeless children are frequently prone to such infections and conditions as diarrhea, gastroenteritis, upper respiratory infections, ear infections, and the like. These medical problems often result in missed school days, reduced attention spans in the classroom, and even delayed language development.

Finally, the need for clean, presentable clothing and adequate school supplies frequently affect homeless children's school experiences. Without adequate clothes and supplies, a homeless child feels conspicuously different and vulnerable. The consequences of a child's peers knowing he or she is homeless can be disastrous. Some homeless children are reluctant to attend school if they have been ridiculed and ostracized.

Some of the most serious educational problems found among homeless children result from a lack of necessary resources. Meeting children's physical needs can go a long way toward maximizing their learning potential. The McKinney Act authorizes several kinds of activities in this area, including referral to health services (Section 723(b)(2)(C)), coordination between schools and other agencies serving homeless children (Section 723(b)(2)(I)), other extraordinary or emergency assistance (Section 723(b)(2)(O)), and direct service provision (Section 722(c)(2)). The following examples prove that there are many innovative efforts under way to help alleviate the difficult circumstances homeless children frequently confront.

- The Philadelphia School District guarantees all its pupils the following health services:

  Annual vision screening

Hearing screening in grades K-3, 6, and 11

Biannual growth screening

Scoliosis screening in grades 6 and 7

Tuberculosis screening in grades 1 and 9

Dental screening in grades K-4

Health history review

Assistance in finding a family doctor or clinic

Provision of health information and referrals

The school district's nurse practitioners and shelter-based medical personnel work together to identify and service the additional health care needs of children living in shelters. Schools let shelter nurses know when children living in shelters need physical exams, immunizations, or health needs assessments. Schools working in conjunction with community service and shelter providers can oftentimes quickly satisfy the medical needs of homeless children and their families.

• As a result of efforts within the Department of Education in Orange County, California, the county's health and social services departments now provide health services at locations that are convenient for homeless families. Personnel from each of the departments travel to two sites where homeless families commonly gather. There they provide homeless children and their families health screening, referrals to free health care providers and other social services, and advice on nutrition and hygiene.

• The Seattle School District's Effective Schools Initiative for Homeless Youth program provides a 5-8 member Student Assistance Team (SAT) to each of its six "designated" schools serving homeless children and youth. This team serves to identify basic transitional needs such as clothing, school supplies, and the like. The team trouble shoots, coordinates tutorial services, and develops individualized action plans for homeless children and their families. Each SAT is typically composed of the school principal, the case manager, a family support worker, the school psychologist, the school's coordinator of volunteer services, a volunteer worker, a tutor, and the program evaluator. Once a week, the team meets to discuss the needs of incoming homeless children and follow-up on the progress of others. In addition, the SAT helps homeless families identify and gain access to various social service agencies throughout the city.

• The Madison, Wisconsin School District's Transition Education Program (TEP) provides counseling and supplies to homeless students and their families. Students take part in weekly support group activities and can speak with the program's counselor whenever they have a problem. Students are also provided with school supplies, clothes, snacks, breakfasts, and hot lunches. TEP also offers parents the

same service it offers the children, including access to the program's counselor, clothing, and personal supplies.

Social and Emotional Needs

Being homeless is a traumatic and stressful experience for anyone, especially children. In addition to their many physical needs, homeless children may have special social and emotional needs resulting from a destabilized, disrupted, or confused family life. These needs may be amplified in situations where homeless children are ridiculed and stigmatized at school. The instability and uncertainty of their lives can make it hard for homeless children to achieve in school.

Much of what contributes to the emotional instability of some homeless children is the fact that homeless families are constantly forced to move. Mobility is perhaps the most common characteristic of homelessness. In fact, before ever reaching the shelters, families have moved in and out of the homes of relatives and friends several times. One of the unfortunate consequences of such mobility is that families are constantly having to move their children into and out of schools as they search for new places to stay. Even shelters typically allow families to stay for only limited periods of time. Some of the manifestations of this forced mobility for the child include the following:

- lack of a sense of private space or possessions;
- aggressive behavior;
- frustration; and
- difficulty with transitions.

Strategies do exist, however, for combating the negative consequences of persistent migration. For example, providing a secure and consistent school experience for homeless children can do wonders for the emotional stability of a child. School can be a safe haven for the child whose family life is in turmoil. Some schools, for example, have created special policies limiting the amount of regrouping, rearranging, and classroom changing that teachers can impose on students. Such policies are intended to help children and youth feel secure, comfortable, and familiar with their classroom and school surroundings and can temper the consequences of the unsettling and uncomfortable situations that homeless children face outside of school. Furthermore, strategies such as these are beneficial to all children, not just those who are homeless.

In choosing and carrying out these strategies, schools must bear in mind that "homelessness alone should not be sufficient reason to separate students from the mainstream school environment" (McKinney Act, Section 721(3)). States and districts are required to adopt policies and practices to ensure that homeless children are not isolated or stigmatized (McKinney Act, Section 722(e)(1)(I)).

Other strategies include providing sensitization workshops for students and staff. Because students and school staff often do not understand or recognize the problems accompanying homelessness, it is difficult to shield homeless children from the unpleasant realities of others' ignorance. The effects of being ridiculed in school can be emotionally devastating to children. Therefore, states are required to develop and implement programs to heighten awareness of specific problems of educating homeless children and youth (McKinney Act, Section 722(c)(5)).

The following are descriptions of programs addressing the social and emotional needs of homeless students:

- The staff of the Portland, Oregon, School District's "Project Return" offers training to increase district staff's awareness of and sensitivity to the conditions facing homeless youth. Training sessions include information on the experiences faced by homeless children and the educational and emotional consequences of homelessness.

- At a local elementary school, the Detroit, Public Schools established "Programs for Homeless Children" to serve children living in three area shelters. At the school, a full-time social worker provides a variety of services to program participants, including individual and group therapy sessions that help children develop self-esteem, self-expression, and problem-solving and motivational skills. The social worker also helps homeless families obtain special education services for their children and organizes weekend and evening field trips for students who maintain regular school attendance and satisfactory academic achievement. Homeless parents also have access to the program's guidance and counseling services.

- The Massachusetts State Department of Education's "Inservice Workshop Project" sponsored a series of workshops in 1989-90 to inform educators, shelter providers, and other social service agents about the special needs of homeless children and their families. Among the workshops' objectives were the following:

  to help parents, teachers, and children recognize the similarities between themselves and homeless families;

  to help teachers assist homeless students to form friendships with their non-homeless peers;

  to inform teachers, shelter providers, and social workers about the "common fallacies and myths" about homelessness; and

  to inform teachers and other school staff about the problems homeless children typically confront in and out of school.

Educational Support

After a homeless student was inappropriately placed in her fourth-grade class in the middle of the year, Mrs. Hikes began talking with other teachers at the school about their experiences with homeless students. She quickly realized that, on average, every teacher in the school had one or two homeless students in his/her class. Worried that students were not being placed in the appropriate grade level or receiving necessary services, Mrs. Hikes approached the school's principal and district administrators to see what could be done. She discovered that, in response to growing numbers of homeless families living in the town, the district was developing a system that would help schools assess and appropriately place students in the regular classroom more quickly. In addition, the district was trying to hire more counselors to help with the escalating number of students and families needing services.

Mrs. Hikes felt, however, that once the students were placed they would not receive enough support. She began working with the school's principal, teachers, and the Parent-Teacher Association to expand the services available to homeless students at her elementary school. With a grant from the district, teachers and parent volunteers developed an after-school program that met three times a week. The program, which was open to all of the school's students, offered academic tutoring as well as cultural and recreational events and activities. In addition, Mrs. Hikes and parent volunteers worked out car pooling arrangements so that homeless students would always have a ride to and from school when needed.

Schools must ensure that homeless students receive all the educational services for which they qualify (McKinney Act, Section 722(e)(5)). These include appropriate grade placement and also support services, such as special education for some students and enrichment for others. Unfortunately, one of the most formidable obstacles to educational attainment for homeless youth is their mobility. Educators are often reluctant to put the necessary effort into devising an appropriate program for a student who may leave the school soon after arriving. School administrators may also feel that conducting assessments for homeless students outside the usual assessment cycle is too burdensome and expensive. However, mobility is becoming a national issue that can no longer be ignored. It is an issue not only for homeless children but for others as well: children from households whose parents must move to find employment opportunities; children whose parents are in the military; and migrant children who travel from place to place due to crop growing cycles often remain in one school for periods that are less than one month long.

School staff must develop ways of effectively handling mobility, as it is affecting significant numbers of children across the country. The following are some general suggestions for actions school staff might take to address the mobility issue:

- Teachers need inservice training that can prepare them to work with children who enter and leave their class during the year while still maintaining the flow of their curriculum.

- School counselors can be trained to handle issues that affect incoming children and their families, using a whole system approach to assist the child and the family to adjust to the new school.

- Assessment can be flexible enough to deal with children who enter school at times that do not correspond to the regular assessment cycle. These may include less expensive, relatively accurate preliminary assessments to allow a student immediate access to educational services.

- A school can expedite the assessment process (e.g., for placement in special education) if requested by a parent or by school personnel. Special policies can be designed to ensure due process, yet allow for prompt evaluation and placement if needed. If school personnel learn that a homeless student is moving, they should intervene to find out if the child's enrollment in that school can be maintained.

Districts and schools must provide homeless children with the educational programs and support systems they need to succeed. Programs like Chapter 1, which provide instructional help to educationally disadvantaged youth, are

available to all eligible children. Moreover, some districts and schools create programs that specifically address the educational needs of homeless children. Districts can also establish before- and after-school or summer programs to help homeless students receive the support that they need (McKinney Act, Section 723(b)(2)(F)). Such programs, which need not be limited to homeless students alone, can offer academic support, cultural enrichment, counseling, or recreational activities. What is important to know, however, is that Section 722 of the McKinney Act requires that homeless children receive education services comparable in quality and quantity to those provided to their non-homeless peers. In addition, the law requires state and local educational agencies to "adopt policies and practices to ensure that homeless children and homeless youth are not isolated or stigmatized" (Section 722(e)(1)(I)).

Following are some examples of ways state departments of education, districts, shelters, and local schools are addressing the educational needs of homeless students:

- The New York City Board of Education offers an after-school program that provides tutoring and counseling services as well as recreational activities for all students. The project was initiated in 1985 to serve the needs of homeless elementary students in New York City schools. The project provides transportation between the shelters and the schools four days a week. After school, from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m., 150 students receive tutoring, counseling, and recreation services.

  To avoid stigmatizing homeless children, this project is open to all interested students. It is funded through the state board's Attendance Improvement and Dropout Prevention program.

- New York City also provides an academic project offering instruction and support services to homeless adolescents who live in shelters and transitional hotels throughout the city. The project provides remediation in reading, writing, math, and English as a second language. Instruction is also available for GED preparation.

- To improve homeless students' self-esteem and interest in learning, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction provides tutoring services, latchkey and after-school programs, school supplies, and home-to-school transportation. The department offers recreational activities and educational services to students, including classes in language arts, mathematics, science, music, and art. Students also write and illustrate their own books consisting of personal stories about being homeless.

- Maryland has initiated several projects in an attempt to offer comprehensive services for its homeless students. The services available reach approximately 1,200 students a year. One example, the Helping

Hands Project, provides tutoring and homework assistance, reading materials, designated study areas and reading corners, as well as cultural activities to homeless children in 40 shelters across the state. The project assigns teams of four adult volunteers and two paid high school students to tutor students in their shelter or at the local library.

Teams of teachers visit local shelters to provide homework assistance and general remedial help. Services are provided two days a week for one-and- a-half-hour sessions. All the teachers are volunteers, so there is no cost to the schools or the state.

Collaborations to Ensure that Homeless Students Have Access to School

The Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness found that because the city's various agencies and organizations failed to cooperate in their efforts, many homeless children and youth were not receiving needed services. In response, the mayor and school superintendent appropriated funds to hire a homeless liaison to improve communication among the city's service providers and to improve the city's programs and services available to homeless children.

The new homeless liaison's first act was to call a meeting for school principals, shelter providers, representatives from city and state social service agencies, and the superintendent of schools. The initial meeting gave providers an opportunity to become acquainted with one another and the services and programs available to homeless people. In order to keep better track of individual families, it was agreed that the meetings would be held monthly and that the homeless liaison would work to improve the district's record keeping on homeless students.

Ensuing meetings allowed service providers to share information about individual families and further develop district policies. The district developed informational pamphlets, made available at all of the city's homeless shelters, which described the school registration process and provided information about school and city programs available to homeless students and their families. School personnel also began visiting shelters to talk with families of homeless students, ensured that students had adequate study areas, and offered tutoring to those in need. The homeless liaison created a computer tracking system that kept up-to-date records on all homeless students and worked closely with school personnel and homeless providers to monitor families that had moved from the shelter. In addition, the homeless liaison began working to obtain donations of school supplies and clothing from local businesses and foundations so students would be prepared for and feel comfortable in school.

Ensuring that homeless children and youth have equal access to educational services and enjoy the necessary conditions for learning requires cooperation and collaboration between educators and service providers. Homeless students face a variety of economic, educational, and personal obstacles that may limit their educational opportunities. Unfortunately, no single agency or organization has adequate information and resources to meet the multiple needs of homeless children and youth. Consequently, the most effective educational programs often have two or more agencies collaborating and coordinating their efforts to ensure that homeless students and their families receive a more adequate range of services. The McKinney Act requires coordination between state education agencies and other agencies serving homeless children (Section 722(d)(4)) and coordination with other relevant programs and service providers (Section 722(d)(5)).

The following are examples of collaborations between different agencies and institutions. The collaborations are often more complex than they appear, because even the simplest programs demand that a number of different organizations work together. Successful programs often require state and local resources, the participation of service providers, institutional support, and significant community involvement. A key element of most successful programs is that two or more organizations form a partnership to improve the educational opportunities of homeless youth.

The School District and Shelter Providers:

- The Oakland, California Salvation Army Shelter and the Oakland Unified School District have collaborated to provide needed services and support for homeless children. The shelter requires children to attend school, and parents are provided with information on the available educational choices. The shelter and the district have agreed that residents can attend the school of their choice within the district. The school district provides transportation passes for older students, and the shelter gives parents passes to accompany young children. The shelter also runs an after-school program offering academic and recreational activities.

- The New York City Board of Education's Students Living in Temporary Housing Program has family assistants at each participating shelter. The assistants visit the shelter daily and are responsible for ensuring that each family understands the options available for placing their children. The assistants then help students and their parents work out transportation and education decisions. Shelters provide education programs for parents and children and often choose to hire social workers or guidance counselors to complement the program.

• The Madison, Wisconsin Transitional Education Program (TEP) emerged as a result of a city-wide effort to combine services for homeless people. Initially, shelter operators came together to discuss issues facing homeless families. After these meetings, the director of the Salvation Army shelter approached a local elementary school to discuss working together to create TEP. The result was a program that mainstreams homeless students into regular classrooms after assessing their needs. In addition, the program helps parents enroll their children in school and gain access to other available social services.

The School District and Other Human Service Agencies:

• The New York City Board of Education has created the Career Education Center (CEC) to work with adolescent homeless students at 25 city shelters and programs. CEC has a school program at each site offering academic instruction, counseling services, and enrichment activities. The board funds counselors and social workers to assist the students and act as a liaison between them and the school. The program works with community cultural arts groups to offer the students creative, structured cultural activities. CEC has also formed partnerships with businesses which provide financial support and mentoring opportunities for students to shadow professionals.

The State Department of Education and Shelter Providers:

• The Massachusetts State Department of Education sponsored a number of inservice workshops in 1989-90 to give educators a better understanding of how to best serve the area's homeless population. Children's advocates, shelter providers, and state agency representatives assisted in the development of the workshops. The department also developed a program with adolescent shelters in which a certified teacher works with a shelter site to provide educational services to students temporarily unable to attend regular classes. The program also provides tutoring services to homeless adolescents who enroll in a regular educational program. The shelters were instrumental in designing and implementing the program. Recently, the department developed a video on the causes of homelessness for classroom use.

Below, we describe strategies used to create and promote collaborations such as those discussed above. The successful strategies include creating opportunities for communication and high-level representation.

Regular Contact Among Agencies:

• Local politicians, shelters, school district officials, and schools in Dallas have maintained close contact through monthly meetings and special task forces. The mayor first brought together local social service providers and business leaders to address the needs of an

increasing number of homeless families in the area. These regular meetings allow area shelters, school officials, and other service providers to share information on the services available to homeless people as well as specific information on the needs of particular families. As a result of these meetings, volunteer groups and service providers have combined to offer homeless students tutoring, recreational activities, health care, and counseling services. For example, the Dallas Jewish Coalition began tutoring at a local elementary school. In addition, the district's Chapter 1 parent liaison has also taken on the job of being the district's advocate for homeless students; the liaison attends these meetings to coordinate with local shelters and service providers in monitoring individual students and designing responses.

High-level Representation from Agencies:

- Philadelphia's superintendent of schools formed a task force on homeless children made up of representatives of the district's health and education departments, the Office of Services for the Homeless and Adults, area service providers, private charities, children's advocacy groups, and local politicians. The task force agreed to work within these agencies to improve services for homeless people and identified several prominent needs of homeless children. The school district then initiated a number of programs in response to the group's recommendations:

  Students can now attend their former school or the school nearest the shelter and are immediately registered even if they lack immunization and school records.

  Upon registering, students obtain the services of counselors who place them in programs, determine their needs (e.g., school supplies, clothing, counseling), and visit them at the shelter.

  Homework centers are funded with McKinney money and staffed by district teachers and counselors in two of the largest shelters.

  School and shelter nurses share students' medical information.

  The school district created the position of homeless student liaison/coordinator, who is responsible for identifying and tracking homeless students and establishing and maintaining contact with shelters and the schools serving homeless students.

  In addition to setting the above policies, Philadelphia's Homeless Student Initiative Project produces and distributes a booklet that contains policy information and recommendations for school-level administrators, teachers, and other staff about ways to effectively serve the needs of homeless children. This booklet also includes names and phone numbers of relevant

individuals working with the school district's homeless project. In addition to the booklet, the Homeless Student Initiative disseminates information to shelter providers, case managers, social workers, and parents regarding available services to help meet the educational needs of homeless children and youth.

• Another example of high-level coordination occurred when New York University and a nonprofit community organization, with funding from the U.S. Department of Education and the New York City Board of Education, designed and implemented a program to give homeless adolescents the chance to obtain their high school diploma. Staff recruit for the program in welfare motels, shelters, and group homes. The program then provides support for the students until they graduate from high school. Housed in the Bronx-Regional High School, students have access to the school's counseling and special services to assist them in completing school.

• And, in a final example, the Seattle Public School District worked with area service providers and the University of Washington to develop and implement a plan to meet the needs of the district's homeless students. The superintendent established a 37-member Homeless Education Advisory Council comprised of educators, shelter providers, and representatives of community organizations and social service agencies.

Other Support Services

This section describes additional support services for homeless children that do not fall under a single category. The strategies we highlight draw your attention to the variety of services and activities that help—either directly or indirectly—fill a gap in the educational and life experiences of homeless children. For example, because shelters are large, noisy buildings offering little privacy for anyone, homeless students often fall behind in their schoolwork. Offering homeless students a quiet place to study may help improve their achievement in school.

Another strategy that may help prevent children from becoming introverted and withdrawn is setting up recreational activities for homeless children outside school. Examples of such activities include enrolling students in Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, and taking them to museums, beaches, baseball games, or even shopping. Schools and shelter providers might even consider setting up appointments or "play dates" for homeless children to visit the homes of their classmates. Sponsoring activities such as these could go a long way toward enriching the childhood experiences of homeless children.

Finally, schools and shelters should consider establishing parent education programs so that parents can become better informed about the services available to them and their children. Such programs could help parents learn how they can help their children with schoolwork and participate in school activities.

The following are examples of strategies and programs schools and school districts have devised to supplement the school and life experiences of homeless children and their families:

- An important component of Oklahoma City Public Schools' Positive Tomorrows program is helping parents learn how to become participants in the education of their children. Positive Tomorrows provides parent workshops on accessing social and educational systems, and the program has obtained the services of a local community center to provide job training for homeless parents. Parents also receive vocational training, mental health counseling, and attend parenting skills workshops at local social service agencies. In addition, parents and program volunteers work together to develop recreational activities at the shelters for children and youth.

- Realizing the importance of homeless children's everyday experiences, the New York City Community School District #2 decided to identify the types of after-school activities most youngsters were participating in and get homeless students involved as well. After talking with the relevant service providers, a reasonable financial arrangement was made that would allow homeless children to participate. Now, homeless children

in District #2 participate in YMCA activities, Big Sister/Big Brother programs, and other activities sponsored by various local organizations.

- Reading Is Fundamental's Project Open Book works to establish cozy reading corners in shelters, schools, and housing projects. Currently there are 50 sites across the country, 80 percent of which are in homeless shelters for families or battered women.

  Project Open Book, developed with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Compensatory Education Programs, works through the homeless coordinators in each state. The project receives donated books from publishers and warehouses them. Private donations enable the project to ship the books and, when necessary, book cases, comfortable chairs, and other furniture needed to make a comfortable reading area for children. Participating institutions give a book to each child. Parents are also supplied with simply written material on how they can best read and share books with their children.

- The Maryland Department of Education's Helping Hands project furnishes each of the 40 shelters in the state with a set of encyclopedias and other materials for their homework rooms.

- The New York City Board of Education's Project Advance offers programs in mentoring, cultural arts, and parent involvement. Several community arts groups, including Theater Rehabilitation for Youth and Plays for Living will collaborate on a cultural arts program to involve participants in creative, structured activities. Parents participate in 20 training workshops on topics such as school governance, skills needed to help their children with schoolwork, and employment opportunities.

What You Can Do for Homeless Children in Your Community

Up to this point, we have addressed institutional responses to the national problem of educating homeless children and youth. The final question to be addressed is what individuals can do to help homeless children obtain positive educational experience. The following is a list of suggestions for ways you as a principal, district administrator, school secretary, teacher, counselor, shelter provider, or other agency administrator can begin to remove barriers to education for homeless children; we have prioritized them according to first and second order concerns. First-order concerns are generally those tasks related to getting homeless children enrolled and properly placed in school; second-order concerns relate to strategies that support and improve a child's experiences in and out of school.

Many of these suggestions were collected from material distributed by the Maryland State Department of Education, the School District of Philadelphia, the New Hampshire State Department of Education, and the Nevada Homeless Education Project. As you read, remember that homeless populations often shift within districts, as well as city- and state-wide. Just because you have never had a homeless student population before does not mean you don't have one now.

Principal or District Administrator

First Order:

• Learn about homelessness in your community and determine the extent to which the schools and school district have responded.

• Evaluate current programs serving homeless students in other nearby areas to locate ones that might be effective in your schools. Pay attention to the size of the district, the program, and the homeless student population served. Keep in mind that larger districts may be in the position to provide more services or may perhaps serve a different type of homeless population than yours. Consider all the demographic and logistical variables before adopting a particular program or strategy. Contact local shelter providers and your state homeless coordinator for further information.

• Develop programs with community organizations and health and social service agencies to meet the needs of your homeless population.

• Consider convening a task force on educating homeless children; such an endeavor will inform community service and municipal agencies about each organization's efforts to address the problems homeless children typically confront.

• When developing programs, remember the value of parent participation. Programs that encourage parents to be partners in their chil-

dren's education go one step further in addressing homeless students' educational needs.

• Do not segregate homeless students into one particular school. Integrate them into a variety of schools throughout the district. In New York, NY, the program is called "Fair Share" —all city school districts share the responsibility of transporting and educating the homeless student population.

• Appoint a staff person to act as an advocate for homeless children and youth.

• Prepare staff and key personnel to follow the guidelines for transfer and registration of children residing in shelters.

Second Order:

• Prepare your staff to be sensitive to the condition of homelessness. Invite the state coordinator and shelter director to participate in staff awareness sessions.

• Work with shelter staff to update information on school events, problems, concerns, and academic support.

• Contact local service agencies (e.g., Salvation Army, Goodwill Industries) and collect clothing and food donations that families can use in emergencies.

School Secretary

First Order:

• Make parents and new students feel welcome by greeting them warmly. Assist parents in filling out necessary forms, and distribute a parent handbook and other important materials. Find out if transporting the child to and from school is going to be a problem.

Second Order:

• Contact your school advocate or teacher to let them know about students living in temporary shelters.

• Invite parents to speak with the school counselor about school lunch and other programs, activities, and services in the school.

Teacher

First Order:

• Be sensitive to the needs of homeless youth, including any medical needs, but maintain consistently high academic expectations.

• Find out where the homeless students in your class went to school last and what subjects they studied. This information can inform placement decisions.

• Have a buddy system in place for all new students. Make sure that homeless students have the opportunity to be a buddy to other new students.

Second Order:

• Provide an atmosphere that welcomes parents to participate in school activities. Offer parents suggestions about ways they can spend time with their children to help with schoolwork or take part in school activities.

• Keep parents informed about school trips. It might be necessary

to contact them in advance so they will have the time needed to pay for any trip fees or collect any trip materials.

• Design an instructional unit around the topic of homelessness.

School Counselors

First Order:

• Work with the principal to solve problems as quickly as possible within the legal guidelines of the system.

• Watch for homeless students in need of food, clothing, shelter, or medical attention and refer them to appropriate agencies for assistance. Take the first step in establishing positive communications with families. Always follow up promptly on referrals to ensure that services have been provided.

• Visit local shelters to keep the shelter staff informed of school activities and enrollment procedures. Keep communications open with shelter staff and share interests and concerns about parents and their children.

• Explain and answer questions that parents and students may have concerning school rules, policies, programs, and services.

Other School Staff

First Order:

• The pupil personnel worker can serve as a liaison between the school and the shelter. Assist homeless families and students in a smooth transition to the new school, and help them identify and gain access to community support resources.

• School nurses can contact the previous school and obtain immunization and health records. They can also identify reliable, accessible sources of medical and dental care for homeless families and their children.

Second Order:

• Parent liaisons can also act to improve communication between the school and shelter. They can provide an atmosphere that welcomes parents to participate in the school's activities. They can also visit the shelters to keep shelter directors informed of school activities, meet with parents, and conduct parenting workshops.

Shelter Providers

First Order:

• Find out what the enrollment policies are in your area and help families be prepared with the appropriate materials before they go to the schools to enroll their children.

• Contact local schools about children who will be enrolling. Develop a working relationship with schools so that the needs of students will be met by both school and shelter staff.

• Provide a space for students to study and encourage parents to work with their children on academic tasks.

Second Order:

• Work with local service organizations or teachers unions to develop educational and social programs

that will meet the needs of your homeless population. Volunteer organizations are often willing to provide parent training workshops and academic tutoring.

• Invite teachers and other school personnel to visit your facility.

State Agencies, Social Service Agencies, and Universities

First Order:

• Social service agencies should contact schools and shelters and develop partnerships to meet health, food, clothing, and other needs of homeless families.

Second Order:

• Work with local service providers by offering resources, disseminating information, and helping develop programs that meet the needs of homeless youth in the area.

• Universities can develop volunteer tutoring programs to serve homeless children in shelters and in school.

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